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SUBJECT: NCP MAY SEEK TO DEFER 2009 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

REF: (A) KHARTOUM 118

(B) KHARTOUM 094

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: NCP-aligned politician Dr. Mudawi El-Turabi indicated that the Khartoum regime may seek national consensus to defer the 2009 elections and hold them at a later date. The NCP's argument would be that Darfur, the South and The Three Areas are too unstable for elections to take place. He also announced the GNU Political Parties Council which is a recently-created mechanism whereby parties come together to discuss policy before it is presented to the Parliament. He urged the USG to engage with this Council in order to improve US-Sudanese relations. END SUMMARY.

2.(SBU) On January 30 CDA Fernandez called on Dr. Mudawi El-Turabi, well-connected DUP Parliament member, political strategist, and Director of the GNU's Political Parties Council. Dr. El-Turabi, a distant relative of Hassan El-Turabi, is part of the DUP faction that is closely allied with the NCP. El-Turabi was joined at the meeting by his deputy, who is a Southerner, and his personal assistant, who is from the East.

GNU POLITICAL PARTIES COUNCIL

¶3. (U) El-Turabi eagerly explained the role of the GNU Parties Council. The Council, which was established in 2006, is a forum in which all of the political parties represented in the National Assembly come together to discuss "issues of relevance to the GNU" and follow up on government business, said El-Turabi. When the Council was first created, it was a loosely-formed institution in which two members from each party would meet informally. In 2007, however, a decision was made to further develop the Council and use it as a mechanism to reach consensus on critical issues before draft legislation went before the National Assembly. The Council now has a constitution, a memorandum of association, a permanent building, and an organized structure. El-Turabi said that the latest edition of the Political Parties Act was designed and agreed upon by the parties in the GNU Parties Council. He boasted that by the time the Act was voted upon in Parliament, only 12 out of 450 assembly members voted against it. El-Turabi credits the smooth passage of the Act to the proactive work of the Parties Council. Consensus on the Armed Forces Act, said El-Turabi, was also achieved in this way.

El-Turabi explained that the upcoming business of the Council will be to discuss and try to reach consensus on the draft National Security, Media, Police and Electoral Acts.

¶4. (U) El-Turabi said "phase II" of the Political Parties Council is to establish party council units at the state level. He has spoken with several governors who he said willingly support the idea. Additionally, he said, GoSS Vice President Riek Machar supports the idea. He admitted that he had received major funding from NCP leader Nafie Ali Nafie for the Political Parties Council.

DOWNWARD SPIRAL OF US-SUDANESE RELATIONS

15. (SBU) El-Turabi discussed with the CDA issues of concern for the GNU - the increasing level of violence in the universities and the presence and growth of fanatical Islamic groups. CDA Fernandez agreed with El-Turabi that the GNU should be concerned about these things. El-Turabi half-heartedly joked that the government must also be concerned with the Americans. Referring to the MFA's recent rebuke of the CDA's public remarks, El-Turabi said that "small things, sometimes, can get out of hand quickly." (ref A) CDA Fernandez told El-Turabi that he will continue to talk publicly about US policy concerns on Abyei, UNAMID deployment, and distrust in Darfur and made it clear that the GNU's threats would not change USG policies.

16. (SBU) CDA Fernandez lamented that even when the GNU does a good thing, it goes about it in the wrong way. He described the NCP as "misers with cooperation" with the international community, doling out cooperation with marked distaste and reluctance. The CDA stated that the USG is disappointed that relations with the Sudanese government have not improved since August 2007. CDA Fernandez said there was a clear opportunity for the Khartoum government to work with the USG to improve relations over the past six months, but it seems as though the Sudanese government did not care and did not try to better things by early resolution of issues related to UNAMID deployment. "It seems as though they want to pick a fight with us, although there is still a chance to improve things" said CDA Fernandez. He indicated that if the GNU expels the British UNAMID Chief of Staff, US-Sudanese relations will only worsen. (ref b).

17. (SBU) When the CDA asked El-Turabi what happened to the Sudanese government delegation that was supposed to visit the US late last year, El-Turabi said that "someone in the Foreign Office" has been

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obstructing the process. El-Turabi, who was to be a part of the traveling delegation, said that the group's passports were given to the MFA on 15 November and that an official letter regarding the trip had been written. CDA Fernandez described this as the "game" that the Sudanese government plays to obstruct U.S. Congressional visits to Sudan and distract from real issues (such as Darfur) on the ground.

A CALL TO DELAY THE 2009 NATIONAL ELECTIONS

18. (SBU) El-Turabi told CDA Fernandez that he is "not optimistic" that the 2009 national elections will be held on time. He explained that there have already been significant hold-ups to the electoral process - the inability of the major parties to agree on the percentage make-up of a mixed electoral system and the continual delay of the national census. El-Turabi warned that Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile, and "even the whole South" are unsafe and unstable for elections to be carried out in 2009. El-Turabi also said that no thought has been given to how the major parties will cope with a change in North/South ratios in the newly elected GNU.

19. (SBU) CDA Fernandez warned El-Turabi that the GNU will have a big problem on its hands if it chooses to delay the 2009 elections. The problem will be one of image and impression, said Fernandez. It will serve to fuel and perhaps confirm the international community's impression that the Khartoum government "cheats on everything." Delaying the elections will be dangerous because it cements a pattern of suspicious postponement and non-commitment on serious peace-building issues whether CPA, DPA, UNAMID deployment or elections.

10. (SBU) El-Turabi responded by listing several "worrisome" political issues. First, the NCP, which has split and formed factions within itself and with other parties, such as DUP, is just a "power-keeping mechanism" without a real ideology. Second, there is no delineation of finances between the NCP and the State. State money is used to finance party activities and other parties are at a critical disadvantage because they do not have access to the same

funding. Finally, the younger generation (those under 40), said El-Turabi, have lost confidence in the current political leaders. He is uncertain whether this is strictly due to political apathy or something more serious. If it is more serious, he said, it could trigger another Kenya. El-Turabi warned that if post-election violence were to occur in Sudan, it would be much worse than what is currently going on in Kenya and will lead to a disruption in the whole region. El-Turabi joked, "We will need all your troops that are now in Iraq" to contain such a situation. Because of this potential for violence, El-Turabi suggested that "if there is national consensus to waive the 2009 elections to a later date until the parties are more ready, I am for that." CDA Fernandez warned that if the GNU delayed elections, it would be seen as the "unraveling of the CPA." The CDA added that Southerners fear that if there are not elections in 2009, there will be no referendum in 2011.

¶11. (SBU) El-Turabi's deputy, who is a Southerner, stated that the SPLM is not ready for elections. He said that the mindset within the party must be transformed from military to political and there must be a South/South dialogue. He also expressed concern that many smaller parties do not have their own financial support base and will not be able to accept international funding if they register under the Political Parties Act. CDA stressed the importance of the ability of all parties to compete on a level playing field, but again warned that delayed elections will make the GNU look very suspicious.

A CONCILIATORY REQUEST FOR COOPERATION

¶12. (SBU) The meeting ended on a positive note with El-Turabi saying that the GNU Political Parties Council would like to touch base and cooperate with the U.S. on vital issues such as the proposed elections law and media act. He said it was important for the Council to be open to the entire international community in Sudan and strive toward creating "openness and democracy." He expressed that the GNU should not work in a vacuum and that the Council will work with the international community to find solutions to our differences.

¶13. (SBU) COMMENT: El-Turabi's suggestion that the national elections be delayed is the first time that a politician closely aligned with the NCP has suggested that the elections should not go forward as planned in 2009. Other NCP leaders have suggested that it is the SPLM which wants to postpone elections but doesn't want to bear the political cost of calling for such a delay. El-Turabi's idea that a national consensus to "waive" the elections to a later

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date can be reached is unrealistic but would provide a certain amount of political cover for such a controversial step. Southerners fear that if elections do not go forward as planned, the 2011 referendum will also be sidelined and they don't seem to be prepared to make this sacrifice. It is imperative that we continue to use every opportunity to push the NCP to follow up on its CPA commitments.

FERNANDEZ